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ON THE USE OF THE TERM CANCEL.

By Elijah Swift.

All who have had occasion to correct work—particularly that done by poorer pupils—involving fractions must have frequently noticed cases where students "simplify" fractions by *subtracting* the same quantity from numerator and denominator. This is very noticeable in work on trigonometric identities, where students are apt to be careless with their algebra in their eagerness to "make the identity prove." For instance a harmless expression like $\frac{\sin x - \cos x}{\sin x + \cos x}$ becomes $\frac{\sin x}{\sin x}$ after "cancelling" $\cos x$. Is it possible that such processes as these are due to a confusion arising from the two uses of the word "*cancel*"?—for we use the word to denote *dividing* numerator and denominator, or both sides of an equation, *by the same factor,* as well as *subtracting the same quantity* from both sides of an equation. If it would result in clearer thinking, it might be well to reserve the term *cancel* for the process of *division by a common factor,* and to use the expression *subtract from both sides of the equation* for cancel in the other sense.

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